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ABSTRACT

Efforts to integrate the gathering of student outcome data with the long-range planning efforts of Xavier University, Louisiana, a traditionally black college, are described. Attention is directed to the need for measurement of key performance indicators as perceived by students. Rather than soliciting students' views, their participation in activities was determined. That is, levels of student involvement in activities for which the university had projected participation (e.g., percentage registering to vote) were analyzed. Thirty key performance indicators reflect specific objectives regarding academic, student services, and administration. The importance of structuring the survey instrument to elicit responses directly associated with the performance indicators or objectives is addressed. The university's planning document was used as the source of survey items, since it provides clear and measurable planning objectives. Questionnaires were administered to 251 of the 923 students who completed pre-registration forms. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, the level of student involvement in key areas was assessed. These areas include: visiting an art museum, enrolling in a creative writing class, involvement in research, and exposure to standardized tests. (SW)

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XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA

STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF UNIVERSITY ATTAINMENT ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A PAPER PRESENTED
TO THE
TRADITIONALLY BLACK COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE
SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
OCTOBER 28, 1982

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SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the 1982 Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research held in Birmingham, Alabama, October 1982. It was reviewed by the SAIR Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research in higher education. This paper has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of Conference Papers.

Gerald W. McLaughlin
President, SAIR

OUTLINE

1. Abstract
2. Background
3. Procedures and Methodology
4. Presentation of Data
   a. Narrative
   b. Tables
5. Conclusions

ABSTRACT

The gathering of student outcomes data has proceeded nearly unimpeded in academia for some time with little regard for the utility of the data by planners. Likewise, the analysis of such data has been promoted as an aid to adminstrators in planning. Only recently, however, have administrators focused on the need to insure these data are relevant to their long-range planning needs. This paper will describe one attempt to integrate the gathering of student outcome data with the long-range planning efforts of a small college. The paper addresses the need for measurement of key performance indicators as perceived by students. One principal difference in the structure of this study from other studies is the deliberate attempt to avoid soliciting student opinion in favor of determining actual participation of students in action items included in the university's long-range goals and objectives. Additionally, the paper will attempt to show the importance of structuring the survey instrument to elicit responses directly associated with those goals and objectives (key performance indicators).

BACKGROUND

As part of Xavier University's Planning, Management and Evaluation process, the Planning Team (composed of administrators, faculty and students) establishes a list of key performance indicators by which the university will measure its effectiveness in attaining certain goals. These key performance indicators reflect specifically defined objectives in the major areas of the university: Administration, Academics, and Student Services.

One of the objectives established in the University's most recent planning effort was the development and implementation of a methodology to determine student assessment of university attainment on 30 key performance indicators. To this end, the Office of Institutional Research was given the responsibility for the development of an evaluative process whereby students could provide input on the university's effectiveness in meeting certain objectives.

Two efforts were made in the development of the evaluative process before a method was found that met the specific needs of the university's planning/evaluation concept. In 1981 a questionnaire was prepared by Institutional Research and distributed to a randomly selected group of students. The survey instrument contained identifier interrogatives (Sex, Classification, Attendance Status, Major), additionally there were 10 items where students were asked to respond yes or no to determine their level of participation in

certain activities (academic advisement, library usage, work-study program, etc.); an extensive evaluation of the work study program was contained in 19 questions where students were asked to indicate the range of agreement/ disagreement on statements such as: "My immediate supervisor(s) (do)es a good job of supervising my work."; finally, students were asked to evaluate the levels of courtesy and effectiveness in 26 offices/departments/support units at Xavier.

Because of the low volume of responses received, the results of the survey were deemed inadequate to base sound conclusions, and no further action was taken. However, an evaluation by Institutional Research on the instrument itself brought these conclusions:

1. The questions were not specifically associated with defined key performance indicators and were thus of little planning value.
2. The inconsistent response format made coding and analysis by SPSS or other statistical analysis packages difficult, if not impossible.
3. The method of randomly selecting students, mailing them questionnaires and hoping for a response lacked control mechanisms and was not cost-effective.

A redesign of the survey instrument and methodology sought to address these problems. Discussion on the methodology is contained in the next section, "Procedures and

Methodology".

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

When redesigning the survey instrument in 1982, particular attention was given to meeting the previously mentioned deficiencies. Additionally, it was necessary to establish a baseline against which to measure the long range plans/goals of the university. For this reason, the current draft of the university's planning document was chosen as the sole source of survey items. The Planning Team was asked to provide the Office of Institutional Research with 30 key performance indicators which they felt were in need of student assessment. By tying student evaluation directly to previously identified key performance indicators (which are integral elements of the university's performance evaluation plan), student input could be more meaningful. In other surveys students are often asked to evaluate instructors or administrative service units on performances not related to true measurements of effectiveness. Such an approach impacts the reliability of their responses since the attitude of students responding to such meaningless surveys is often, "What the heck, any answer will do!"

The second point of structuring the questionnaire so that the responses could be analyzed using software such as SPSS or other statistical analysis packages was also addressed. Except for the identifier interrogatives at the top portion of the questionnaire, and the final item which

asked the students to express an opinion, all questions were clearly designed to produce a dichotomous (yes/no) response. This approach allowed Institutional Research to use SPSS to see defined levels of involvement in several activities in which the university had projected student participation. For example, the planning team set as an objective of the university that a certain percentage of Xavier students would be registered voters by a given date. Survey results indicated that the level of registered students not only met the projected level of 75%, but was 7% higher. Eighty-two percent of those students surveyed indicated that they had registered to vote. A separate survey limited to seniors indicated that 92% of that group had registered. Allowing for even an error rate of .05, we are satisfied that the survey instrument provided us with an accurate picture of university attainment in that key performance indicator.

The method of randomly selecting students and mailing them a questionnaire, hoping they would respond to it and return it to the Institutional Research office was replaced with a system of requesting all students who were pre-registering for classes to fill out the form. Out of the 923 students who completed pre-registration forms, 251 (or 27%) took the time to complete the questionnaire on student evaluation of key performance indicators. The 251 respondents included all of the 43 majors. A distribution of students by sex showed that the female/male ratio was roughly 2:1 (69% to 30%) which approximates the university distri-

bution of students by sex (67% to 33% female/male). Additionally, we asked students to identify themselves as resident (campus) or city (off-campus). Of the respondents (N=251) 32% were campus students and 68% off-campus. The general distribution of campus vs. city students shows approximately onefourth (25.9%) live on campus while the remaining (74.1%) are city students. The survey was shown to be an overall representation of the student body.

Using the cross-tabulation capabilities of SPSS, we were able to further define the level of student involvement in key performance indicators as it reflected certain majors, the sex of the student, their classification and whether they were resident hall students or city students.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

In discussing the methodology of formulating the survey instrument, we pointed out the direct relationship of the questions to the university's long range plan. That, of course, is the point of this discussion---assessment of attainment on key performance indicators. A look at an example of the long range planning document shows that a few broad-ranging statements which serve as the general goals of the institution are refined into measurable objectives, and then specific strategies toward attainment of those objectives are listed as subsets. For example, Goal 1 states, "(students will) be intellectually, morally, and spiritually prepared to contribute effectively to the creation of a more just and humane society." The first objective under that broad goal states, "By July 1985, documents will show that at least 50% of Xavier's students participated in a campus activity during the 1984-85 academic year, designed to teach respect for religious ideals, to improve the moral integrity of the student population, or to foster spiritual growth." Furthermore, one of the strategies (# 6) toward attainment of that goal states, "By July 1, 1984 at least 75% of all students...will be able to document their participation in the interdisciplinary program of ethics seminars..."

The first question of the survey (116) asks, "Have you participated in an ethics seminar at Xavier?" Of the surveyed students, 17.5% answered yes; in the separate

survey of seniors, however, that figure doubled to 35.7%. Since the strategy was set against a date of July, 1985, the data gathered served merely as a baseline from which the university must then set its efforts. Table 1 illustrates the comparative results of the survey against the 1985 goal for this key performance indicator.

Table 2 illustrates the level of attainment of student participation in five selected key performance indicators: 1) Visitation to the New Orleans Museum of Art, and 2) Enrollment in a creative writing class (to instill an appreciation for aesthetics; 3) Exposure to standardized tests and 4) Involvement in research (to prepare students academically); and 5) Voter registration (to develop leadership).

The actual performance relative to the stated goals of the university is not what is important at this point (although as stated earlier, the data serve as a baseline for future measurement). What is important is that the method employed of using specific university goals (key performance indicators) directly related to questions posed to students for their input to the planning/evaluation process allows us to pinpoint levels of progress and/or lack of progress. From that point, the Planning Team can revise goals, objectives and/or strategies. Generally speaking, goals are not frequently changed, except for minor revisions which do not alter the basic premises. Measurable objectives and specific strategies, however, can be and often are

revised by the Planning Team. This is particularly true in instances where the measurable objectives are either unrealistic, or the strategies suggested do not lend themselves to attainment of the stated goal.

The principal advantage of the survey instrument design has been its ability to isolate levels of progress against specific key performance indicators (university objectives). Realizing that there is still considerable refinement of the system before us, we are confident that this system of measuring student assessment of key performance indicators is a workable tool.

Table 1: PERCENT OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN ETHICS SEMIN.

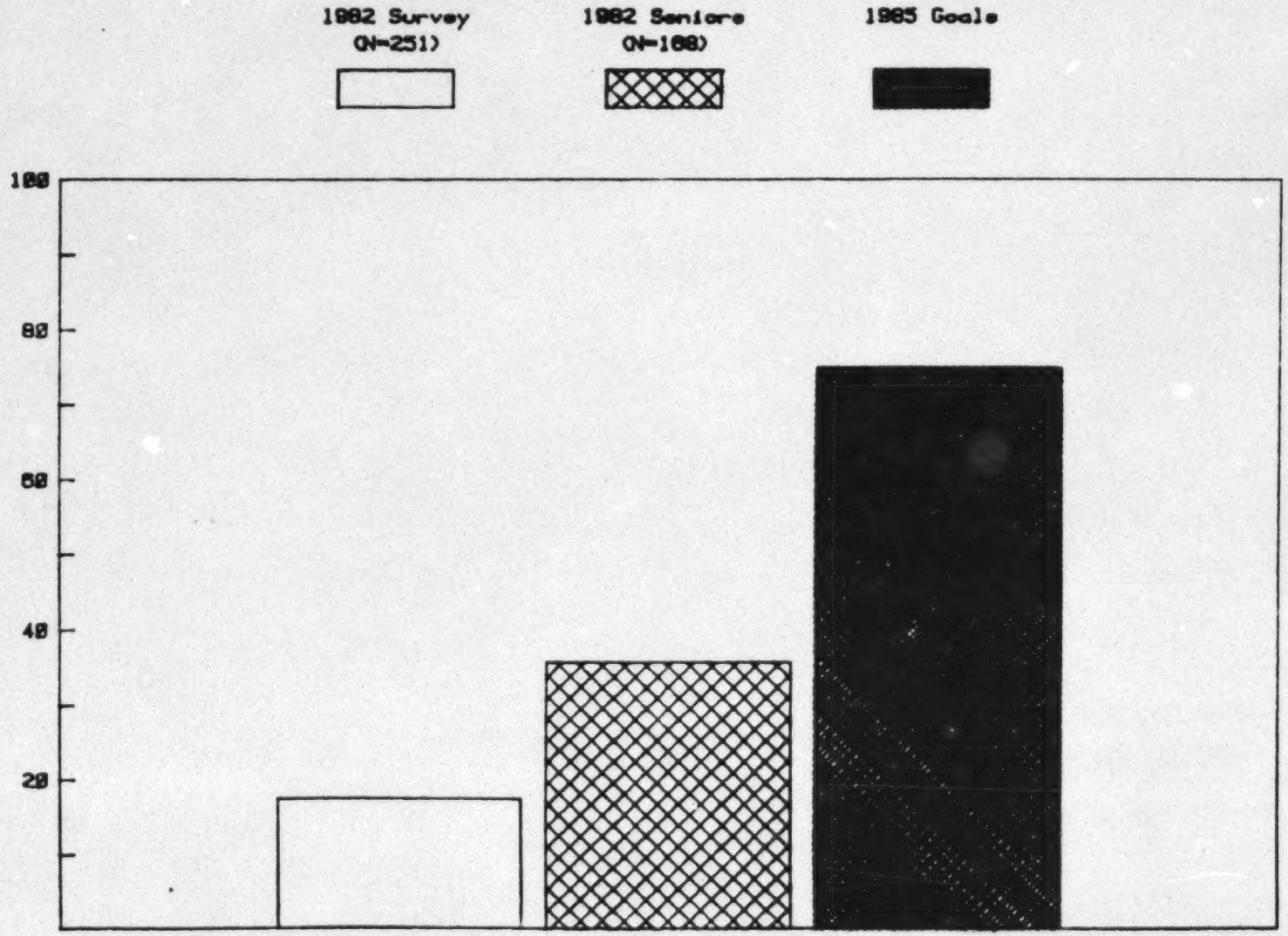
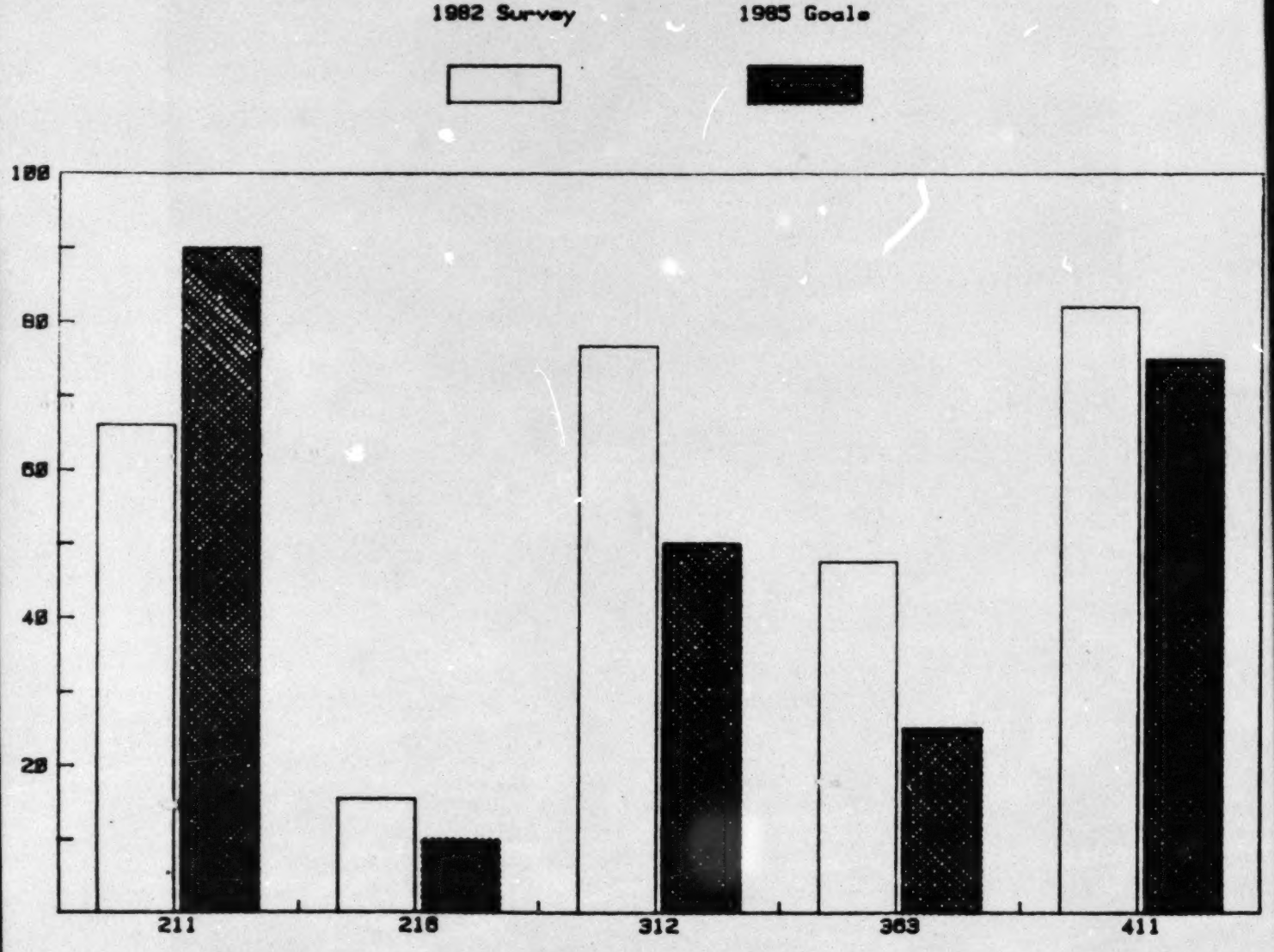


Table 2: PERCENT PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN SELECTED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



CONCLUSIONS

The historic pathway of academic planning has been, at best, littered with the remains of noble attempts to bring improved quality decision making into the realm of higher education administration. In too many cases, the critical factor in the success or failure of the planning effort has been the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan without disrupting the programs of the college.

The procedures described in this paper have proven useful in bridging the gap between success and failure in the evaluation of the total planning effort of a small college. It is freely admitted that the system is not perfect and that data must be carefully analyzed before action based on the data is taken. It is a workable tool that has proven effective and efficient. More specifically, the system has proven that an evaluation system can be effective and not burdensome while providing information needed for essential decision making.

A summary conclusion shows:

1. The evaluation system is based completely on the planning document endorsed by the university.
2. The planning document provides clear, specific, realistic and measurable planning objectives. Without such precision, any evaluation system that seeks to provide information to the administrator will prove useless.

3. The clarity of the objectives as stated to the students helps eliminate the natural resistance of students to participate in a vague administrative procedure. In fact it enhances the cooperation of students because they can both comprehend and identify with university goals and objectives.
4. Top managers are involved in the design of the survey instrument through their role on the planning team. In this manner, the results of the study are given increased consideration and credibility by the managers at decision time.
5. Involvement of top managers assures that the proper amount of information is gathered because the decision makers will have considered the level of data needed to determine the desired course of action.